



THE PROMISED ONE | THE PROMISED KING

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Over the last several weeks I have suggested that the Bible tells one long unfolding story, which finds its center and its fulfillment in Jesus. If you miss that overarching storyline, then you rip the heart out of the Bible and you forfeit its power in your life. So during this Advent season, we have been exploring how Jesus fulfills all of the ancient promises of Scripture. Jesus fulfills the promise made to our first human parents, Adam and Eve, in the garden. Jesus is the promised human who will crush the serpent's head, though he will be wounded in the process. Jesus fulfills the promise made to Abram. Jesus is the promised Son, the promised seed, through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. And last week we considered how Jesus fulfills the promise to Moses. He is the promised prophet, like Moses — the one to whom we should listen.

Today we'll turn to 2 Samuel 7, and here's the context. The year is approximately 1000 BC, and David is now firmly established as the King of Israel. Life is starting to feel a little bit more stable and secure for him, and so he starts thinking, now is the time for me to do something for God. David is living in a nice house, and so he decides that he should build a nice house for God, too.

Advent may begin in a similar way for us. We might think to ourselves, well, I've reached a certain point in my life when I should make some changes. Maybe I should try to take my faith more seriously. We might think that, well, we should do something for God. But like David, every time we come up with a plan like this, we may find that God interrupts those plans in quite unexpected ways. So before we ever do anything big for God, we need to realize that God is already at work bringing a kingdom for us. As we turn to 2 Samuel 7, I'd like us to consider what this passage reveals to us about: 1) *David's heart*, 2) *God's heart*, and 3) *our own hearts*.

⁸Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. ⁹And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. ¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵but my steadfast love will not depart

from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” ¹⁷In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

2 Samuel 7:8-17

If you have the Bible in front of you, I might encourage you to keep it open, because I may refer not only to this passage but also to some of the verses that precede it. We'll be looking at the entirety of chapter seven. But first, let's consider what this passage reveals to us about David's heart.

David's Heart

At this point in the story, David has united all 12 of the tribes of Israel into one nation, he has transformed Jerusalem into his capital city, and now he has achieved relative peace against his various enemies, and so he eventually brings the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. The Ark of the Covenant was the most important element in ancient Israel's worship. It represented not only God's presence but also God's throne. And so David brings the Ark into Jerusalem in order to show that God, rather than David, is the true King of Israel who is now dwelling in the midst of his people. And so now David can finally relax, because as the beginning of the passage tells us, “Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, ‘See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.’”

See, David is living in this beautiful home with paneled walls made out of expensive cedar, and so he starts thinking to himself that here he is, living in this beautiful home, while the Ark of the covenant is being kept in a tent. To put it in terms of New York real estate, basically David comes to the realization that he's got a better apartment than God. So he thinks he should do something about this. He decides to build a house for God, meaning a temple. He's going to build a temple where God can dwell in the midst of his people.

So he shares this idea with the prophet Nathan, and initially Nathan responds in the affirmative. He says in verse 3, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.” But not so fast, because that very same night, God speaks to the prophet Nathan through a vision and he tells him, nope. Not gonna happen. Go tell David that he's got to revoke the building permit. This building project is not moving forward.

I think that David reveals to us here the instinct of every human heart. The instinct of every human heart is to say, I'll do it myself. I will do it. Now, at first glance, it certainly appears as if David's heart is in the right place. He's sincere. He wants to build this temple for all the right reasons, and it appears that maybe the only problem here is that he just doesn't see God's point of view on the situation because he's got his own earthly limited perspective. He assumes that what seems right to him must be in accordance with God's will. But it doesn't always work that way.

This little episode reminds me of the words of the London pastor Charles Spurgeon who once said that discernment is not the ability to tell the difference between right and wrong, because everyone can do that. True discernment is the ability to tell the difference between what is right and what is almost right, and that takes quite a lot of skill. David has to learn this the hard way. Proverbs 19:21 could have been written for David, because it says, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.” We can come up with all kinds of plans in our own minds, but the only thing that is going to stand is God’s divine purpose.

So it may be that David’s heart was in the right place and he just didn’t have the right perspective on the situation. But on the other hand, it’s also very likely that God detects within David’s heart a hint of self-assertion. And so essentially God is asking David, where did this idea come from? Are you really doing this for me in order to make my name great, or are you doing this for yourself in order to make your name great? And he questions him. Do you really think that you are in a position to help me? Everything you have is a gift from my hand.

God reminds David, look, I am the one who took you from the pasture, from following the sheep. I’m the one who made you a prince over my people, Israel. I’m the one who went with you wherever you went and gave you victory over your enemies. I’m the one who has established this peace that you can now enjoy. I’m the one who made your name great. So what makes you think that I need you? Everything you have, everything you are, is a gift from me. So why do you act as if you haven’t received this gift from my hands?

So we need to stop and we need to consider what might really be motivating David here in his desire to build a house. And likewise, we too need to stop and ask ourselves, why do I do the things that I do? What is motivating me? What are the reasons for why I do the things I do for God? Am I doing it just to demonstrate my gratitude for the gifts I have received from his hand? Or am I trying to get leverage over God? Do I do these things because I think that then God is obligated to have to do something for me in return? Is it really transactional? Do I do these things in order to show my love and appreciation for God and for who he is or to try to prove myself in some way?

We’re called to look beneath the surface to see what’s happening within our hearts and to question our own motivations. And you see, this is what separates Christianity from mere religion, because a religious person would be willing to repent of the bad things that they do, but only a Christian would repent of the good things that they do for all the wrong reasons. We realize that many of our attempts to be good or to do the right thing, underneath the surface, might be nothing more than an attempt to justify ourselves in the eyes of God, in the eyes of other people, or in our own eyes. But it’s all just a form of self-salvation.

A Christian is someone who realizes, “I can’t save myself. I can’t do it myself. Only Jesus can do it for me.” And that’s why the old hymn puts it like this: “Cast your deadly doing down.” I love that. I love the way that the poet puts it: “your deadly doing” — the doing for all the wrong reasons. “Cast your deadly doing down, down at Jesus’ feet. Stand in him, in him alone, gloriously complete.”

God's Heart

Let's turn from what this passage reveals about David's heart to what it shows us about God's heart. What does this passage teach us about God? And what it shows us is that God's heart reveals the shock of divine grace. See, Nathan delivers the hard news to David in verses 5-7. He's not going to build a house for God. God reminds David that the Ark of the Covenant has not dwelt in a house from the very time that God first rescued his people from their bondage in Egypt. He says, I've never lived in a house. I don't need a house. A tent is perfectly fine with me. I'm good with a tent.

But nothing could have prepared David for what God says next. God says to David, you are not going to build a house for me — rather I am going to build a house for you. Now, when David uses that word house, he means a temple. But when God uses the word house, he means a dynasty. David wants to build a temple for God, but God says, oh, no, I'm going to make a dynasty out of you — the House of David.

Now, 1 Chronicles 22 explains a little bit more of what was going on here. It gives us a parallel telling of the same account. And 1 Chronicles 22 explains that David was not allowed to build a temple for God because he had waged too many wars. He had shed too much blood. There's too much blood on his hands, which made him ceremonially unclean to build a temple, a house for the Lord. Even though David fought the Lord's battles, and even though God gave him victory over his enemies, David's rule was marked by conflict. Therefore God promises that David will have a son — a son who will be a true prince of peace rather than war. And as a result, it's actually David's son Solomon who will be the one who will build a temple — a house for the Lord to dwell in. And God promises that he will be a father to Solomon, to his son, in return.

But here's what I find so beautiful about this whole episode. Even if David is suggesting building a house for all the wrong reasons, it doesn't prevent God from showering his blessing upon David. Even if he's got it completely wrong. Even though he doesn't deserve it. And God makes this unconditional promise. There are no conditions here. He makes an unconditional promise to David: You want to build a house for me? No. I'm going to build a house for you. That's how God works with all of us. By sheer grace, God pours out these unconditional promises upon us that we don't deserve, and nothing — not even David's deepest, darkest sin — could ever cancel the promise.

What this shows us is that God relates to us not on the basis of our merit but on the basis of his grace. Like David, we too might want to go out there and do great things for God. Let's build him a house, and that way we can prove our worth to God and we can win the respect and the admiration of others. But God says, no. I'm sorry. It doesn't work that way. Because his grace always precedes our work. God is always out in front of us. God is the one who always makes the first move. He always takes the initiative. Our life is simply a response to what he has first done for us.

But let me stop and reflect for a moment. What do we actually mean by this word "grace"? It's one of those words that we often hear in a church context, but what does it really mean? Grace is often defined as unmerited favor — God's unmerited favor. And that's a pretty good definition. It's good as far as it goes. It just doesn't go far

enough, because God's grace is even better than unmerited favor. A better definition would be that God's grace is demerited favor.

Here's what I mean by that. Unmerited favor would suggest that God gives you something that you don't deserve in a relatively neutral sense. But actually, through his grace, the love we receive is the exact opposite of what we deserve. It's not unmerited favor; it's demerited favor. Because what is it that we deserve? We deserve judgment, and yet we receive mercy. We deserve condemnation, and yet we receive forgiveness. We deserve exclusion, and yet we receive embrace. And this is really what changes everything. This is the essence of the Christian faith.

Victor Hugo, the author of the novel "Les Miserables," says that receiving this demerited favor is the key to experiencing happiness in this life. He once said, "The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved — loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves." The key to happiness is receiving a love in spite of who we are and what we've done.

That's not to suggest, of course, that God's grace, his demerited favor, gives us permission to live our life any way we want. Some people have made that mistake over the years. They've thought to themselves, well, this is a great deal. If God accepts me on the basis of grace rather than merit — not because of who I am or what I've done but because of who Jesus is and what he's done for me — well then I can do whatever I want! The poet W.H. Auden once put it like this: "I like to sin. God likes to forgive. Really, the world is admirably arranged. What could be better than this?"

Now on the one hand, if that thought has never crossed your mind, it may mean that you've never really heard the gospel. Because the gospel is shocking, simply because it is so radical and so free. And yet on the other hand, if you think that God's grace gives you license to do whatever you want, you haven't really heard the gospel, you haven't really experienced it at all, because God's grace always leads to a changed life.

Now look again at verses 14 and 15. God promises to be a father to David's son, Solomon. He's going to treat him like a son, which means that if he should sin, then like a good father, God is not going to spare him, but he's going to discipline him. And yet nevertheless, God promises that he will never, ever remove his steadfast love from David's family.

That's how it is for us, too. God loves you as you are, right where you are. But God also loves you far too much to let you stay where you are. You see, his love changes you. He showers his love upon you, not because of anything you have done or will do or because of any hidden potential he sees in you. He doesn't love you because he sees what you'll do in the future. No, he simply loves you because he loves you.

And that's what gives you utter security. If there's nothing you had to do in order to win God's love, then there's nothing you could ever do to lose it. If he showers his grace upon you, it means that there's nothing you could do to make God love you more, and there's absolutely nothing you could ever do to make God love you less. He

refuses to ever remove his steadfast love from you, because when he adopts you into his family, he treats you like his own beloved son or daughter.

Of course it's possible for us to displease our Heavenly Father. We displease him left and right by the stupid things we do or say or think. And yet even if we displease him, we can never lose our status in the family. Our position is fixed. We belong to him, now and forever. He will never remove his steadfast love from us, and it is the promise of that love that progressively changes us.

So this really is the difference between Christianity on the one hand and mere religion on the other. A religious person will say, I obey, and therefore God is obligated to bless me and make my life go well. But a Christian is someone who says, God blesses me, God accepts me, God showers his favor upon me, not because of who I am or what I've done, but because of who Jesus is and what he's done for me. And therefore I obey, not in a vain attempt to try to win his love but in order to demonstrate that I already have it. I'm motivated not by a sense of duty or obligation but rather by gratitude and joy for what the Lord has already done for me in and through Jesus Christ.

So this Advent, as you reflect on your own spiritual condition, if you start to feel like maybe you're not enough, if you start to think that spiritually you are weary or you're lagging behind everyone else, or you feel unworthy... good. Good, because God has you right where he wants you to be. He doesn't relate to us on the basis of merit; he relates to us on the basis of grace. And Advent reminds us that our ultimate hope does not rest on our spiritual record or performance; instead our hope lies in his unconditional, unshakeable, unbreakable promise. The essence of that promise is right here for us in 2 Samuel 7, and once that truth hits home, it will melt your heart and it will change you forever.

Our Own Hearts

So let's turn from considering David's heart and God's heart to taking a look at our own hearts. If you look carefully at God's words to David through Nathan, you quickly realize that these promises couldn't possibly be fulfilled simply through David's son, Solomon. And therefore this passage provides us with a bit of a primer on how to read the Old Testament, because the whole Bible operates with multiple layers of meaning. So especially when it comes to the Old Testament, you have to look for the near interpretation and the far interpretation.

What's the near interpretation? The near interpretation is that David's son, Solomon, is the one who will reap the benefits of all of David's military victories. He will become the king of peace, and he is therefore the one who will build God's house, the temple in Jerusalem. But that can't be the only interpretation, because God's promises here are far, far too extravagant to be completely fulfilled in the coming of Solomon.

What this shows us is that the authors of the Old Testament, from the very beginning, not only saw the immediate interpretation, but they also saw far into the future; they saw that there was an even greater fulfillment to come. So look closely again at verse 12. God says, "I will establish his kingdom." But then in verse 13, God says, "He shall

build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” And then again in verse 16, “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

But if you keep reading the Bible, you know that the House of David eventually comes crashing down. The House of David is split apart. The united kingdom divides into a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom, and then that northern kingdom is annihilated by the Assyrians, and eventually the southern kingdom is conquered by the Babylonians. They destroy Jerusalem, they set fire to the temple that Solomon built, and then eventually the last kings in the line of David are carried into exile in Babylon. And yet, nevertheless, long before any of that ever took place, the prophet Isaiah wrote that one day a child would be born, one day a son would be given, and he would be a true prince of peace. He is the one who would establish and uphold David’s throne with justice and with righteousness forever.

So you might ask yourself, well, what does any of this have to do with me? What does 2 Samuel have to do with me? And the answer is: everything. This has everything to do with you, because God isn’t just building a dynasty for the House of David; he’s bringing you a kingdom — a kingdom that will never end. See, Solomon could never be the everlasting king that God is promising here. Solomon’s rule was temporary, but Jesus will rule forever. Solomon repeatedly fails, but Jesus perfectly obeys. Solomon builds a temple for God, but Jesus is the temple of God. He’s the place where God dwells in the midst of his people. Jesus is the place where heaven and earth come together. Jesus is the place where the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

That’s why, in the Christmas story, when the angel appears to Mary, the angel says,

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

And this is why Mary and Joseph travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered, because Joseph was of the house and the lineage of David.

Then when Jesus begins his public ministry, how does he announce it? What does he proclaim? He proclaims, “The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.” But when Jesus says the kingdom of God is at hand, he’s not talking in terms of temporal time. He’s not saying it’s almost here. He’s talking in terms of spatial reality. He says, the kingdom of God is at hand. It is near. It has drawn close. The kingdom of God is now confronting you as a reality here and now. Why? Because the kingdom, the kingship, the rule of God is present in the person of the king, and his name is Jesus.

And this is why Jesus said that he had come to build the true temple. Not a temple made with human hands, but rather he would make us, his people — and the entire earth one day — his home, where he would finally fully dwell in the midst of his people. The moment that we put our faith and trust in Jesus, we become temples of the Holy Spirit. God makes his home in us. And all of this, therefore, shows us that God’s coming

kingdom is not based on our spiritual performance. It's not based on who we are or what we do for him. It's all about what he does for us by sheer grace.

Years ago, Bono, the lead singer in the rock band U2, was interviewed about his religious views. His response to this interview sums up everything that we're talking about today. He said:

The thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between Grace and Karma...

You see, at the centre of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you; an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics – in physical laws – every action is met by an equal or opposite one. It's clear to me that Karma is at the very heart of the universe. I'm absolutely sure of it.

And yet, along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that “As you reap, so will you sow” stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff...

The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. That's the point. It should keep us humbled...it's not our own good works that get us through the gates of heaven...

If only we could be a bit more like Him, the world would be transformed... When I look at the Cross of Christ, what I see up there is all my *junk and everybody else's. So I ask myself a question a lot of people have asked: Who is this man? And was He who He said He was, or was he just a religious nut? And there it is, and that's the question.

That is the question. Who is this man? Well, the answer in the Scriptures is that Jesus is the promised king. Jesus is David's greater son. But how does he rule over us as king? Notice that when Jesus comes to us, he doesn't live in some extravagant palace or a lavish temple. He's born in a simple stable. He doesn't have a fancy crib to sleep in, but rather he's placed in a stall. He comes as king not to dominate or to control us, but to liberate us and to empower us. And he's not trying to establish some kind of transactional relationship with us — quid pro quo: you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. He's not trying to establish a transactional relationship; he's establishing a redemptive relationship so that God might shower his demerited favor upon us.

The love that he shows us is the exact opposite of what we deserve. The only reason why we receive mercy is because Jesus receives judgment in our place. The only reason why we receive forgiveness is because Jesus is condemned in our place. And the only reason why we receive embrace is because Jesus was excluded in our place. He doesn't rule, therefore, from a golden throne, but Jesus rules over our lives through a wooden cross.

So what is the condition of your heart today toward God? Some of you may feel indifferent. Maybe a little apathetic. And if that's true, if your heart has grown cold

towards God, well then you need to warm your heart by the fire of the gospel. You have to take these truths, think about them, reflect upon them, meditate upon them until these truths cause your icy heart to begin to melt. We take the truths into our hearts that we heard sung moments ago. How many kings have stepped down from their thrones? How many lords have abandoned their homes? How many greats have become the least for me? See, when you consider who Jesus is and what he's done for you, how could you remain cold toward him? How could you remain unmoved? How could you remain unchanged? You have to warm yourself by the fire of the gospel.

But others of you maybe have received his grace and love in your life, but you know in your heart of hearts that you still have not bent your knee to him as king. Not really. You haven't given him the full allegiance of your life. You haven't completely submitted yourself to him. And so what might it look like to do that? Well, let me give you an example. Let me paint a picture for you.

When Queen Elizabeth II was crowned queen in 1953, as part of her coronation ceremony there were certain lords, dukes, earls, barons who paid homage to her. Now, they don't do this the same way anymore, but at the time they paid tribute to her, and this is how they did it. Queen Elizabeth was sitting on her throne wearing her crown with her scepter and her orb in hand, and then one by one, each of these representative dukes or earls would approach the throne and get down on their knees. And she'd lay aside the scepter and the orb, and then they'd place their hands in between her hands and swear their loyalty to her. They'd effectively say, "I am your loyal subject. I will serve you with my body and with my life. I will be faithful and true. I will live and I will die for you against any that may come against you." And then they'd rise and touch the crown.

And see, here it is. If Jesus is our promised King, then what does he ask of us? In response to his grace, he asks us to pledge ourselves absolutely, completely to him. From the cross, Jesus says, "My life for yours." And so have you knelt before him? Have you placed your hands in between his and said, "Because of who you are and what you've done, my life for yours. I'm your loyal subject. I will serve you with my body and with my life. I will be faithful and true. I will live for you and I will die for you, because you lived and died for me?" Have you done that?

Well this advent reminds us that before we get any big ideas about what we're going to do for God, we have to realize that our life is simply a life of response. Everything we do is simply a response to his grace. And before we ever try to do something big for him, we have to realize that he has already brought a house, a dynasty, a kingdom for us.

Let me pray for us.

Father God, we thank you that Jesus fulfills all the ancient promises of Scripture. We thank you that he is the promised King, the Prince of Peace, who will sit on David's throne forever. And we thank you for the wonder of wonders that rather than being excluded from the kingdom, you have embraced us and brought us in, because Jesus, our King, was excluded and forsaken on the cross in our place for us. And out of love and gratitude and wonder, help us now to bend our knee to him and to give him the full allegiance of our lives. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.